

it may be in the eyes of the beholder. But from the point of view of the United States, there are clear definitions of terrorism, and one of them clearly is the willful killing of innocent civilians who themselves are not in any way involved in military combat. That is what we seek to prevent.

Q. Mr. President, today has been an historical day with the signing of the agreement, with the very first interview by an American President on an Arabic television. Once again, we

thank you very much for this interview and for this time, and we say congratulations on the agreement that's been signed today.

The President. I hope there will be more of these.

NOTE: The interview began at 3:30 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With the Israeli News Media on the Middle East Peace Process September 13, 1993

Q. Mr. President, thank you for granting this interview to the Israeli television. I wanted to ask you first, with your permission, after having Mr. Arafat and Prime Minister Rabin shake, reluctantly, sort of, each other's hand, did you manage to get them to talk to each other?

The President. Yes, indeed. They talked a little bit before they came out and before they had shaken hands. I understand the many decades of events which have divided them and the awkwardness of this moment for both of them. And I understand, I think, why this is different from the agreement reached by Israel and Egypt at Camp David. This was an agreement that will require not just the concurrence of two governments but tens of thousands of people who will literally be living in close proximity to one another. So it was a very challenging moment.

But before we came out, Mr. Rabin and Mr. Arafat were alone in the Blue Room upstairs with me, and we walked down together when everyone else had left. And they had not spoken during the time of the reception. But they looked at each other really clearly, in the eye, for the first time, and the Prime Minister said, "You know we're going to have to work very hard to make this work." And Arafat said, "I know, and I am prepared to do my part." And they immediately exchanged about three sentences, right to business, no pleasantries but went right to business. But I thought they were both quite serious.

And you saw what happened on the stage. They did shake hands. A lot of people thought that would never happen. And I thought the

fact that they did it and that they said what they did, each trying to speak to the people represented by the other, was an important gesture.

Q. How involved, Mr. President, do you plan to get in getting this accord off the ground?

The President. Very involved. I spent about 10 minutes with Mr. Arafat today after the occasion and made it clear to him that I was prepared to take the lead in trying to organize the finances necessary to carry this through and to try to build the political support for it but that it was imperative that he honor the commitments made to Israel's security, to denouncing terrorism, to assuming responsibility within the areas of self-government for maintaining law and order.

And then I came over here to the Oval Office and went into my dining room and had lunch with the Prime Minister. And we had a good, long talk about what the next steps are. And I reaffirmed to him my determination to use the influence and the power of the United States and the resources of the United States to make sure that the people of Israel feel more secure, not less secure, by this agreement. And we talked a little about that, and we agreed that we would move immediately to begin to implement it.

Q. Were you disappointed with the contents of Mr. Arafat's speech, if I may ask, since many Israelis feel that he did not repeat those commitments that he was undertaking in writing. That is, to publicly denounce terrorism, say "no more violence," repeat what the late President

Sadat was saying here during the ceremony of Camp David: "No more war, no more bloodshed." He was probably the only speaker who didn't say it explicitly. It is not the way we wanted to hear him say that.

The President. Well, he did say the time had come for an end to war and bloodshed, but he did not reaffirm the specific commitments he made in writing. And yes, I think I would have liked the speech better had he done so. But when I listened to it in Arabic, it seemed to be delivered with great conviction and passion, more than the translation would imply. And I think you have to have a certain discount factor really for both of the speeches because of the ambivalence of the supporters of both men about this agreement. I mean, Arafat, after all, did not get a unanimous vote in his council for this agreement. You know, what he was trying to do is to reach out to the Israeli people to establish his good faith without further weakening his position.

And by the same token, I think the Prime Minister did a terrific job of reaffirming to the Israeli people how difficult this was for him, how strongly committed he is to the welfare of the people of Israel and why, that he is doing this because he thinks it's better for them.

I wasn't perhaps as disappointed as you were, because I thought it was so important that Arafat came and spoke directly to the people of Israel, reaffirmed in general the commitments he had made, looked at me and thanked the United States in ways that he—I mean, he has to know, because I've made it so clear publicly and privately, that the United States is committed to the security of Israel and that therefore if he wants us to help him, he's going to have to honor every last one of the commitments he made, which in private again today I asked him to do, and he reaffirmed that he would.

Q. Do you feel, Mr. President, that in view of the new circumstances in the Middle East, the American commitment to Israel's security will have to take a different shape, other forms?

The President. Well, I think we may have to do some more different things. We may wind up doing more in terms of economic development; we may wind up doing more in terms of shared technology. I think we've agreed already, the Prime Minister and I have, in our previous meeting that we want to do some more joint strategic thinking just to recognize the fact that military technology itself has changed the

dimensions of what Israel has to do to protect its security. But I would leave it with you this way: I have no intention of doing anything on my own which would in any way raise the question in the mind of any citizen of Israel that the United States is weakening in support for the security of Israel. The only way we can make this work is if every day more and more and more Israelis believe that they will be more secure if there is a just peace. That's why I went out of my way not to try to impose terms in these negotiations but only to create the conditions and the process and the environment within which agreement could be made and why I have constantly, since it was announced, reaffirmed my commitment to the security of Israel.

Q. In a conversation with Mr. Arafat last night, he was asking me—he doesn't need me as an intermediary, of course—to ask you on this interview today whether the United States would be willing to help the Palestinians create those institutions and establish this police force which—

The President. Absolutely. Absolutely, I would be willing to help him do that. And I think that is very much in Israel's interest. And my clear impression from the Prime Minister and from the Foreign Minister and from our contacts back and forth is that that's what you want me to do, that's what Israel wants me to do.

There are all kinds of practical questions left unanswered by this agreement. This agreement has very specific commitments on Israel's security and sovereignty and right to exist, on denouncing terrorism, on the Palestinians being willing to assume responsibility for conduct within the areas of self-governance. But it doesn't say how is a police force going to be set up, funded, and trained. How are elections going to actually be conducted? How will the candidates be able to get out and campaign? All these things have not been worked out. These are areas where the United States can genuinely help the process to work.

Q. Is there any change in the U.S. position on the establishment of a mini-Palestinian independent state at the end of the road?

The President. No. Our position on that has not changed. That is something that the parties are going to have to discuss and agree to. The United States is not going to change its position. That is something to be left to the parties to make and discuss.

Q. Mr. Arafat was speaking last night about his wish to have some form of confederacy with Jordan. Mr. President, will the United States support moves in this direction, linking up whatever Palestinian entity will finally emerge into—West Bank and Gaza with the national kingdom of Jordan?

The President. Well again, let me say the first step there is for Israel and Jordan to make peace and to reach an agreement. And I think a general agreement is forthcoming very soon. Then the three of them can get together, and they can discuss those things, and we'll see whether there is agreement among the parties to the peace process. If all the parties agreed, then the United States would be supportive. We want to facilitate the debate. We want ideas to remain on the table. But we don't want to impose a settlement of any kind. And so we'll just see what happens.

Q. The agreement between Israel and the Palestinians was reached through Norway, as an honest broker, mediator. We could not hope, I believe, to arrive at any conclusion of our negotiations with Syria without your administration playing a major role in bringing the two sides together. Do you think the time is right now to embark upon a similar effort in getting the Israelis and the Syrians together?

The President. I think we have to keep the talks going, but I think first we need to focus on implementing this agreement. And if you look at what happened in Norway—I mean, I think it was quite important. But if you go back and look at how it fit with the talks going on here in Washington, the question of the relationship of Israel to the PLO is such a volatile one that I doubt seriously that this agreement ever could have been made in Washington with anybody's involvement because of the intense publicity surrounding everything that happens here.

The thing that Norway did that was so important was to provide a representative of Israel and a representative of the PLO a chance to talk over an extended period of time in absolute secrecy so that they were free to say things

to one another and to explore ideas without having to read about it in the paper the next day. And I think it was very important.

Our job during this time was to keep this process going, not to let the deportation crisis and the crisis occasioned by the raids in the Bekaa Valley or anything else derail this. And I was pleased with the agreement which came out which was very like the original principles the United States put on the table and that it included the Gaza-Jericho resolution which we were very pleased by.

Q. Finally, Mr. President, there are probably five million Israelis watching us now and five million Palestinians and who knows how many other Arabs across the border, whatever you would like to tell them on this day.

The President. I would like to tell them that this is a great day for the Israelis, for the Palestinians, for the Middle East, but it must be followed up. We must make good the promises of this agreement. And the United States has a terrific responsibility first to make Israel feel secure in making peace; second, to help the Palestinians to set up the mechanisms of self-government and of growth, of economic opportunity; and third, to keep the overall peace process going. And I intend to meet my responsibility. But in the end, whether it succeeds depends upon what is in the minds and the hearts of the people who live in the area.

I believe with all my heart that the time has come to change the relationships of the Middle East and that the future is so much brighter if we can abandon the polarization, the hatred, not just the war but the constant state of siege which prohibits and prevents both the Israelis and the Arabs from having anything resembling a normal life. I think the Middle East can bloom again. It can be a garden of the world if we can put aside these hatreds. And I'm going to do what I can to help.

NOTE: The interview began at 3:45 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.